



SILVER SPRING CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Thursday, September 15, 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE SILVER SPRING ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

This letter is sent on behalf of the Silver Spring Citizens' Advisory Board to express our strong support for the re-designation of the Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District.

The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board is appointed by the Montgomery County Executive to provide counsel on the issues and needs of the downtown Silver Spring and Takoma Park region, which includes the Silver Spring Arts and Entertainment District.

We support the re-designation because of the importance it has in the revitalization of Silver Spring. The District's tax incentives for artists and businesses have helped to establish and grow many art and entertainment organizations. As a result, this has also enabled success of surrounding restaurants and businesses as well as built a sense of community and improved the quality of life for our residents. By re-designating the Silver Spring District, this will ensure the continuation of a thriving arts community in Silver Spring and facilitate further development in underutilized areas.

Over the years, the arts and entertainment designation has enabled the establishment of major arts organizations including Discovery Communications, Round House Theatre, Maryland Youth Ballet, American Film Institute, and Pyramid Atlantic Art Center. More recently, there has also been the establishment of the Fillmore concert hall and expansion of Montgomery College's cultural space that includes a concert hall, an experimental theatre space, and two galleries.

The designation has also spurred the establishment and growth of smaller organizations. To name a few, this includes Docs in Progress which nurtures emerging documentary filmmakers, Gandhi Brigade which provides youth with video and graphic design training, Urban Nation which provides youth performing arts instruction, Class Acts Arts which brings performers and artists to schools and the correctional system, Bonifant Theatre which produces the work of African American writers and performers, and Fenton Street Market which operates a weekend artists' market.

We have also seen a major commitment by the community to host several cultural events, including Silver Spring Jazz Festival, AFI's & Discovery's SilverDocs Festival, Silver Spring Blues Festival, Silver Spring Swings concert series, and several musical performances produced by Downtown Silver Spring/Peterson's Management Group on Ellsworth Drive. We are also seeing restaurant owners embrace the arts by creating their own cultural events to attract customers.

All of these organizations and events have helped establish Silver Spring's growing reputation as a destination for art and entertainment. It has brought thousands of people to the area, which helps support our restaurants and other businesses. As the retail industry struggles in this sluggish economy, we note that the shops on Ellsworth Drive are all full and there is a waiting list for space. We have also seen a growing number of restaurants, many of which are minority owned, being established on adjacent streets.

While we have seen great success, this Board strongly believes that there is more to be done. Re-designation will be a critical part of continuing efforts to develop unused or underutilized spaces in the downtown and south Silver Spring areas. We urge you to re-designate the District to help the community fully realize its vision for Silver Spring as a regional hub for arts and entertainment.

On behalf of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board,

Kathy Stevens, Board Chair

cc: Ike Leggett, County Executive
County Council Members